

## FAQs for Medical Students

### **Applying for Residency through the Air Force**

**All USUHS and HPSP medical students and ROTC educational delay medical students are required to apply to the Joint Service Graduate Medical Education Selection Board (JSGMESB) at the beginning of their final year of medical school.** This requirement was outlined in the contracts you signed accepting your HPSP scholarship or USUHS appointment. The JSGMESB is the process by which Air Force obligated officers compete for selection in GME residencies and fellowship programs. In order to train in any residency or fellowship program whether military or civilian you must apply to the JSGMESB and receive approval to train in that specialty.

### **Overview of JSGMESB process**

The Joint Service Graduate Medical Education Selection Board (JSGMESB) is the process by which Air Force obligated officers compete for selection in GME residencies and fellowship programs. The process is analogous to the civilian match but differs in several important ways. The JSGMESB is a triservice selection board. Senior physicians (program directors and consultants) from the Air Force, Army and Navy review and score each application and select individuals for training based on previously established training requirements. Individuals are selected for training based on scores determined by the selection board. The process is overseen by a Management Level Review Board and the Board President who has final approval for all selection and placement decisions. Unlike the civilian match in which selection and placement is determined by computerized rankings, the JSGMESB does take into account personal issues such as prior service, joint spouse assignments and unique family issues when making placement decisions. It is important to remember that the JSGMESB scores each applicant based on the contents of their application. Therefore, it is vitally important that you assure that all required documents are received in a timely manner.

The JSGMESB is designed to be a fair and competitive process. DPAME (AF Physician Education) works hard to assure the integrity of this process. Strict adherence to the rules and guidelines of the board process is one of the mechanisms DPAME uses to assure the process is fair and equitable.

Training requirements are determined through a process called the Health Professions Education Requirements Board (HPERB). The HPERB meets in late May/early June each year and forecasts future AF physician requirements in each specialty. The HPERB results are listed on the Physician Education website and list training opportunities by specialty and location. You can only apply for training in specialties that have training requirements identified.

### **What are the key dates to remember?**

**JSGMESB timeline** – approximate dates are given below. For each application cycle you will be given specific dates and deadlines in your application instructions.

**Late June/early July**- HPERB results released. Identifies training opportunities by specialty and location

**Late June/early July** - Application instructions sent to students (NOTE: It is important that DPAME have a current email address)

**September 15**- Core application deadline. **This is your application for residency, do not miss this deadline.** If your application is late, you will not be allowed to compete for a categorical residency and will only be permitted to train in PGY1 only status

**Early October-** Weight statement due, two letters of recommendation due

**Late October-** Last day for applicants to interview with program directors, USMLE (or COMLEX) step 1 and step 2 scores due

**Early November-** Last day for location preference changes

**Early November-** Program Director Interview sheets due

**Mid November-** Deans Letter (Medical Student Performance Evaluation) Due

**Late November/Early December** (the week after Thanksgiving) - JSGMESB meets

**Mid December-** JSGMESB results released via email notification

**Late January-** Written notice to all applicants

### **What are some of the keys to success in applying to the JSGMESB?**

- 1) A strong medical school academic record- Panel members rely heavily on an applicant's performance during medical school. They want to be confident that students have received a solid foundation in the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to be a competent physician in their specialty. Information they use to assess an individual's performance includes
  - a. Medical School Transcript
  - b. Medical Student Performance Evaluation (formerly known as Dean's Letter)
  - c. Letters of recommendation
  - d. Successful performance on Steps I and II on the USMLE or COMLEX
  - e. Your personal statement
- 2) Performance on Active Duty Tours (ADTs) - Doing an ADT at the location of your residency choice is highly recommended. It gives you a chance to work with the faculty and residents in the program and gives Program Directors an opportunity to assess a number of variables which may not be reflected in the rest of your application package. Such variables include interpersonal skills, teaching skills, work ethic, attitude and ability to work as a member of a team. A strong performance on an ADT can make a big difference in how you are viewed by the selection board. Information on your performance during your ADT is often incorporated in your Program Director Interview sheet.
- 3) Program Director (PD) Interview- This is another key part of the application process. You can interview by phone or in person but we highly recommend that you interview in person if at all possible. The PD interview is a chance for you to ask specific questions about the program. However, the primary purpose of the interview is for the PD to assess you as an applicant. Tips for a successful interview are listed in a separate FAQ.
- 4) Timely submission of all required documents- We realize that medical school puts significant time constraints on students. However, it is critical to your success that documents be submitted on time. We need to be fair to all applicants, therefore, deadlines are firm. Failure to meet these deadlines can have significant consequences for you. **For instance, if you do not submit your core application by the September 15 deadline, you will be unable to apply for a categorical residency and will be only permitted to train in PGY1 only status.** Additionally, PDs see late requests for ADTs and interviews as a sign that you may not be fully committed to your education.

**What are some tips for the Program Director (PD) Interview?** The PD interview is your opportunity to convince the PD that his/her residency program would benefit from having you as one of their residents. A good PD interview can improve an applicant's ability to compete at the JSGMESB. Conversely, a bad interview can really hurt your chance for selection. Each PD does their interview differently but most use the opportunity to get to know their applicant better. Remember first impressions are powerful so you want to be sure you present yourself the way you want to be remembered. Here are some tips.

- 1) **Treat the residency support staff with courtesy and respect** when scheduling the interview and when arriving at the appointment. Program Coordinators are valuable members of the residency program leadership and their input is often sought by the PD.
- 2) **Look professional-** You are applying to a military selection board, so present the proper military image. Come to the interview in your Class A uniform with rank and insignias properly aligned and shoes polished. Make sure your hair is in regulation. Address the interviewer as Doctor or by his/her rank. Use Sir and Ma'am as appropriate. Bring a copy of your 2 page application and CV or better yet, drop it off with the Program Coordinator the day prior to the interview.
- 3) **Learn a little bit about the program prior to your interview.** If the program has a website, review that. If possible arrange the interview about halfway through your ADT and use the first few weeks to ask the residents questions about the curriculum, conferences, unique training opportunities and other aspects of the program
- 4) **Come prepared to answer questions.** Some common questions you may be asked are:
  - a. Why are you interested in Pediatrics? (or whatever specialty you are applying for)
  - b. Tell me about yourself?
  - c. What will you bring to my program?
- 5) **Come prepared to ask questions.** PDs are very proud of their programs and have worked hard to develop a high quality residency program. You want to know what makes their program special. PDs may interpret your decision to ask no questions as a lack of interest in their programs. Some question you might ask include:
  - a. What research opportunities are available to residents?
  - b. What are some unique aspects of this program?
  - c. What are some military specific aspects of this training program?
  - d. What are you looking for in a resident?
- 6) **Try to project yourself as both confident and humble.** I know that sounds contradictory but PDs are looking for individuals who are confident in their current abilities but humble enough to be receptive to further teaching and instruction.

**How does the AF residency selection board process work?** Each selection panel is made up of senior physicians (Program Directors, Associate Program Directors and Consultants) from that specialty. The only documents available to panel members are the documents contained in your application package. ***This is one reason why it is critical for you to submit your documents in a timely manner.*** Applicants are scored by one panel member from each service. Scoring is done using a standardized score sheet. Current medical students can receive scores in categories 1, 2 and 6 so their score from each panel member can range from 0 to 10 points. Additionally, the AF scorer can add points for performance on your ADT (0-3 pts). Scores from each service are totaled using the composite score sheet (also below). In addition to scores from individual panel members bonus points for research (0-2 pts for med students) and prior active duty service (0-1) can be added for eligible candidates in accordance with established criteria. The maximum total score for a current medical student is 36 points. Once scores are rechecked for accuracy, they are placed into the computerized data system and an order of merit list is generated for each panel by applicant category (current medical students, active duty applicants etc) with highest

scorers at the top of the list and the lowest scorers at the bottom of the list. The panel also establishes a cut line; applicants above the cut line have demonstrated to the panel that they are qualified for training in the specialty. The panel then uses the order of merit list (OML) to select applicants for that specialty based on their scores. Placement into specific training locations is also made by the panel using applicant's preferences and AF needs. Selection and placement of qualified applicants continues until all available training allocations have been filled. Once all training allocations have been filled, qualified applicants who remain on the OML list are nonselected for training in that specialty. Panel results are reviewed by DPAME administrative staff and then briefed to the Management Level Review (MLR) Board chaired by an AF Medical Corps General Officer. The purpose of the MLR is to review the panel's decision and to assure its decisions are in the best interests of the AF. Finally, panel results are presented to the JSGME Board President who has final approval for all selection and placement decisions.

**What happens if I am not selected for training in my first choice of specialty?** Most students are selected for training in their specialty of choice. However, there are some specialties where the number of applicants exceeds the available training slots. Selection for these specialties can be very competitive. In recent years, the most competitive specialties have been anesthesiology, emergency medicine, otolaryngology and radiology. **Additionally, as mentioned above any applications received after the September 15 deadline will not be considered for a categorical residency.** If you are not selected for a categorical residency in your specialty of choice there are two possible outcomes

- 1) If you asked to be considered for your second choice for categorical residency on the second choice form, your application will be reviewed by that selection panel. If that panel selects you for that specialty you will begin training in that residency.
- 2) If you did not indicate a second choice or if you are not selected by your second choice panel or if you did not meet the September 15 application deadline you will be selected for a PGY1 only internship in Transitional Medicine, General Surgery or Internal Medicine. Your application package will include a PGY1 only form where you can indicate whether you would prefer to do this training at an active duty location; the form also allows you to rank your preferences (Transitional Medicine, General Surgery or Internal Medicine) for the PGY1 only year.

**I would prefer to do my residency training in a civilian program. Will skipping the program director interview increase my chance for a deferment?** No. The PD interview is a required part of your JSGMESB application. All applicants must schedule an interview with the PD of their highest ranked active duty program. Failure to do so can result in nonselection for your specialty of choice.

If your preference is to train in a civilian program, our recommendation is that you rank civilian deferred as your top choice and interview (either in person or by phone) with the PD of your highest ranked active duty program. Additionally, if there are compelling family reasons why you would prefer to train in a civilian program please inform the medical student program manager, Mr. Matt Kush, about the issues and include this information in your personal statement. Applicants for Neurosurgery must interview with the Air Force Neurosurgery Consultant as there is no Air Force Active Duty Program. **Remember in order to receive approval to train in a civilian program you must apply to the JSGMESB and receive approval to train in that specialty in a deferred status.** The priority of the JSGMESB is to fill active duty programs first so depending on the year and the specialty there may be limited or no opportunities for civilian deferment.

**What are some common mistakes made by students when applying to the JSGMESB?**

The application instructions you will receive from DPAME are very detailed. Reading and following the application instruction will prevent you from making the mistakes listed below. Most of our student applicants have no difficulties with the JSGMESB application process. However, we have noticed that

year after year a few students will make the same mistakes. In an effort to prevent you from making these same mistakes we have listed the most common mistakes made by student applicants

- 1) Not getting your application in by the deadline
- 2) Not contacting the Program Director of your highest ranked military residency for an interview
- 3) Not entering the civilian match
- 4) Supporting documents (USMLE or COMLEX scores, height/weight statement, letters of recommendation, etc) are late
- 5) Applying for training programs or training locations not approved by the HPERB (e.g. Internal Medicine in the National Capital Area)
- 6) Not preparing for your Program Director interview

### **How are my USMLE (or COMLEX scores) scores used by the selection board?**

USMLE (or COMLEX scores for osteopathic students) are a required component of your JSGMESB application packet. All physicians in the Air Force are required to have an unrestricted state license in the minimal amount of time possible, so it is important that students demonstrate the ability to pass their medical licensing exams. Additionally, panel members use the scores obtained on these exams as one of the criteria for scoring applicants.

Students are required to provide USMLE (or COMLEX scores for osteopathic students) scores for Step 1 and Step 2 CK by 22 October. Most students pass Step 1 prior to starting their 4<sup>th</sup> of school. In order to assure your Step 2 CK scores are available by the 22 October deadline, we strongly encourage students to take this test by 15 September.

Students who present to the JSGMESB without a passing score on either Step 1 or Step 2 CK will be less competitive for selection for their residency of choice.

### **If I am selected for a military residency, when will be report date be?**

Each of the military residency programs has an extensive orientation to assist you with your transition to the active duty military and to prepare you for your residency program. Mandatory report dates are usually in early June. Accommodations can be made for trainees whose medical school completion date conflicts with the report date, otherwise trainees are required to report on the assigned date. Please plan accordingly.

### **As an HPSP student do I need to enter the civilian match?**

**Yes.** The Air Force does not have enough training opportunities at active duty sites to meet all of its training requirements. Consequently, each year a certain number of graduating medical students are selected to train in a civilian status. Although certain specialties are less likely to offer deferments, we cannot determine this with certainty until after the board has met. **All** HPSP (or educational delay) medical students should apply to the National Residency Matching Program (or the American Osteopathic Association Intern/Resident Registration Program) for:

- 1) Their categorical residency of choice ( in case they are selected by the JSGME to train in civilian status)

**AND**

- 2) A PGY1 only year in either transitional year, preliminary Internal Medicine or preliminary General Surgery (in case they are not selected for their residency of choice and are selected for a PGY1 only year). Students selected for a civilian categorical residency requiring a preliminary year such as ophthalmology or radiology will need to be in the match to secure the required preliminary year.

If you are selected for a military residency you will be advised to withdraw from the civilian match.

Note: Graduating USUHS students are not required to enter the civilian match, by law they are required to spend their first postgraduate year in active duty status.